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- Calendar
- Health Poll Search

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Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report

Across The Nation | High Number of HIV Cases Found Among Female Inmates in Washington, D.C.
 [Aug 02, 2007]

A high number of HIV cases has been detected among female inmates in the Washington, D.C., jail, according to data released recently by the district [Department of Health](#) as part of a summary of its six-month campaign encouraging district residents to be tested for HIV, the [Washington Post](#) reports (Levine, *Washington Post*, 8/2).

District health officials and HIV/AIDS advocates in June 2006 launched the campaign -- titled "Come Together D.C., Get Screened for HIV" -- which emphasized the importance of HIV testing. The campaign aimed to reach 400,000 men, women and children ages 14 to 84 in the district. According to statistics presented at the Mayor's Task Force on HIV/AIDS, which convened for the first time in June 2006, up to 25,000 people, or more than 4% of all residents, in the district might be HIV-positive. District health officials ordered 80,000 rapid HIV tests for the campaign, which organizers planned to distribute at no cost to hospital emergency departments, private physician offices, community health programs, detoxification and substance use centers, and sexually transmitted infection treatment clinics ([Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report](#), 4/5). According to the *Post*, the jail was "ahead of city health officials' push to make HIV testing a routine part of most medical screenings."

According to the data, 3,216 inmates were tested over a six-month period, 607 of whom were women. The report found that 7.3% of the women tested positive for HIV, compared with 2.7% of the men. Devon Brown, director of the district's [Department of Corrections](#), said he believes the figures are representative of the nearly 2,000 women who are processed annually at the jail. Brown added that commercial sex work and injection drug use -- which

often place people at an increased risk of HIV -- are the most common charges among female inmates. The report also found that inmates ages 45 and older had the highest rate of HIV by age, with 4.8% of all inmates in that age range testing positive for HIV.

According to officials, fighting the spread of HIV in the district's jail is essential to citywide efforts because nine out of 10 inmates are released within 30 days. The district's jail is one of a few facilities nationwide that automatically tests for HIV upon entry and release unless an inmate refuses to receive a test. According to district officials, fewer than 10% of inmates refuse a test. The not-for-profit group [Unity Health Care](#) provides treatment for inmates who test positive for the virus, the *Post* reports.

A December 2006 [report](#) by the [DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice](#) praised the Department of Corrections' approach to testing inmates but said the department should provide counseling and HIV/AIDS education for all inmates, regardless of their HIV status, the *Post* reports. According to Brown, such efforts have been implemented, beginning with HIV-themed programs played on the jail's television system. "You literally have a captive audience," he said, adding that women pay closer attention to the programs than men (*Washington Post*, 8/2).

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